

Sermon – “Bubbles Up”

Sunday, October 29, 2023

Scripture: Deuteronomy 34:1-12, I Thessalonian 2:1-8

Blythe Denham Kieffer, D.Min.

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, IL

Our first scripture is Deuteronomy 34:1-12. It was a sad day for the Hebrew people when their leader Moses died. He had brought them through many hardships and provided the plot and purpose for them on their journey home to the Promised Land. Now it is time for Moses to make his way home to God. Listen to the word of the Lord.

*1 Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, 2 all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, 3 the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. 4 The Lord said to Moses, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." 5 Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. 6 He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. 7 Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired, and his vigor had not abated. 8 The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. 9 Joshua, son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses. 10 Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. 11 He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, 12 and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. Amen.*

Our second Scripture is I Thessalonians 2:1-8. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (probably the earliest writing of Paul), we sense a closeness and affection between Paul and his congregation. The apostle, for Paul, is one who loves and finds joy in God's people. Paul cares for God's people much like Moses cared for God's people several hundred years earlier. Hear now the Word of God.

*1 You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. 3 For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. 5 As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; 6 nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, 7 though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. 8 So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. Amen.*

The title of the sermon: Bubbles Up

*Text: Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab...Deuteronomy 34:5*

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, we thank you for the leaders, the teachings, and the natural world that point us toward home on our journeys. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

*Reformed and always reforming...* As we celebrate Reformation Sunday this weekend and dedicate our 2024 Stewardship pledges, we honor the rich history of our faith journey and those who have gone before us to guide and to point the way home no matter how deep or how far we have roamed.

In the giving of our financial resources, we become a part of something larger than our individual lives and we speak to the joy and privilege of being a part of this faith community. In this tangible expression of our faith, our giving reveals a depth and a rootedness in our lives which make it possible to stand tall in integrity, to branch out in service, and to accept our mortality knowing we are loved, there is light up above, and the joy is always enough.

As we read about Moses' death, we can't help but feel this great loss for the Hebrew people. They had been through so much together and surely Moses had been a leader who loved God's people, who risked his own self in vulnerability, time and time again, as he provided the plot and the purpose of their journey and pointed the way to the Promised Land, a land he would not enter himself.

The Hebrew people crossed the Jordan River without their beloved Moses. Surely, he was with them in spirit, and it was Moses who had a part in forming them into God's people, making their crossing possible. However, they crossed over on their own and there is great symbolism in this crossing. It highlights the importance of each of us coming into our own. There are certain things in life we can only do for ourselves. By doing so we honor those who have shaped our character and identity, who have led us with gentleness and strength, who have kept us accountable, who have loved us, who have pointed the way, the plot, and the purpose, and who want nothing more than for each one of us to come into our own and to know our full potential.

This past Memorial Day weekend, Peter and I woke on Saturday to the news of singer/songwriter Jimmy Buffett's passing. Without a sermon to prepare for Sunday, we found ourselves taking a deep dive into his life, music, and legacy. It was a sentimental voyage as we listened to songs like "Come Monday" and "Margaritaville" that had swept into our younger lives like a rising tide, and now surrounded us with youthful feelings, precious memories, and poignant humor. As described on his website: *Jimmy regaled audiences for over five decades with songs about the faces and places he'd seen during his lifetime journey along the road less travelled. With Hemingway's eye for detail and Mark Twain's inclination for mischievous humor, Buffett's music tells the stories of the hustlers, the beach bums, and the pirates from all corners of the world. Through it all are woven the themes of escapism, wanderlust and an unbridled curiosity that makes life a journey worth taking.*

Jimmy's honest, witty, and insightful lyrics along with his fun-loving, authentic, and gentle spirit have touched and formed the lives of many and before leaving this world he left us with one more gem of a song sharing the intimacy of his own journey home, and pointing the way for each of us, when the time comes, on our homeward journeys.

Jimmy's posthumous hit, "Bubbles Up", describes a natural phenomenon which safely brings deep sea divers' home. When they roam too deeply and too far in the dark underwater, when their compass is spinning and they lose their way, the bubbles they exhale point them upward to the water's surface.

However, this metaphor is about much more than bringing divers safely to the water's edge, it is about each of our journey's home. This is a song affirming the plot, the purpose, and the faith which gives our lives meaning. This is a song about the sweet acceptance and gratitude at the end of the journey; an affirmation, that even when living's a struggle, multiplied double, we love it too much for the party to end, and yet, when we recognize that the party is coming to an end, this is a song celebrating life, popping the cork, and raising a glass to the gift of the journey. This is a song with resounding waves of the Good News we have received from those who came before us and we shall pass on to those who come after us, reformed and always reforming: Know that you are loved, there is light up above, and the joy is always enough.

Today we give thanks for the prophets, apostles, and songwriters who have been willing to share their own selves with us, who are vulnerable in a way that honors our shared humanity, and who offer a healing touch, a word of encouragement and a drop of humor during our greatest struggles.

Today we give thanks to the God who loves us, whose light shines within and above us, and who welcomes us home when our journeys on earth are complete.

Bubbles Up! Amen.